



## INTERAGENCY CONNECTION

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### Chair's Corner



As the fiscal year is coming to a close, we are looking forward to the next fiscal year and what we will plan for our Federal community!

I enjoyed attending the National FEB Strategic and Operational meeting this summer in

Washington, DC along with our Executive Director. The presentations we heard were encouraging in that individuals from Federal Agency Headquarters and White House Staff are familiar with the work of Federal Executive Boards and the value they can add. In one presentation, FEBs were described as the "secret sauce" for federal communities. Nation-wide, the 28 FEBs make a solidified and strong network.



Acting OPM Director, Kathleen McGettigan recognized each FEB Chair during the meeting. This gave me an opportunity to reflect on our

FEB's accomplishments. It continues to be my honor to work with all of you; our FEB is a progressive and collaborative organization that

brings Federal agencies together in many formats to share valuable information during changing times. This allows us to benefit from ALL the best ideas out there!

During the National FEB meeting, OPM also took advantage of having so many of the FEB Chairs in the room and took a photo of all the FEB Chairs attending.



I look forward to this next year and have ideas to improve our "connections"! The first is developing a "Public Affairs Council", providing members of your staff, who have the responsibility for Public Affairs or Community Outreach, an opportunity to network and share best practices. This Council's first meeting will be September 12<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m.; they will operate as part of our Federal Executive Board and may be called upon to assist with FEB "messaging" and other inter-agency activities.

I ask your continued support of our FEB; your efforts are the ingredients to the "secret sauce" in Houston!

Tim Jeffcoat, Chairman

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## 10 THINGS THAT MAKE DUMB LEADERS SMART TODAY

One of the best things to discover is your own lack of brilliance.

Brain function goes down when you're:

1. Stressed out. *If stress makes you dumb, some leaders must be dim-wits.*
2. Fatigued or in need of sleep. Light from computer screens may interrupt sleep patterns. (Science Daily)
3. Multitasking.

### ***10 things that make dumb leaders smart:***

#1. Take a shower. Cleanliness might not be next to godliness, but it's smart. According to "Wired to Create" 72% of us get creative ideas in the shower. Maybe you need a whiteboard in the shower to capture your great ideas.

#2. Put your feet up for five minutes and breathe deeply. If you can't get all the way to five minutes, try three.

#3. Take a walk around the block. Put a 'think time' appointment on your calendar. Get out of the office and stroll around the block with a notepad in hand. (Stop walking when you record an idea.)

#4. Use a pen and paper. Writing is thinking. Typing is good. Writing is better. (Use this for #3.)

#5. Socialize. Play.

#6. Lighten up. Being serious all the time cuts the blood flow to your brain.

#7. Drink coffee. (Harvard Health Publications)



One of the best things to discover  
is your own lack of brilliance.

#8. Listen to classical music. When I was in high school, I was told that classical music made you smarter. Maybe they wanted us to listen to classical music.

#9. Be a little less certain. Think, "I could be wrong." or "What if they're right?" An open mind has greater opportunity to learn.

#10. Explore new ideas before defending old. Ask, "*What did you mean?*" before saying what you think. I notice in team meetings that people are quick to explain why ideas won't work, even though they haven't thought about how they might work.

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/07/20/10-things-that-make-dumb-leaders-smart-today/>

## WHEN COMPASSION HARMS

Supporting people who drift encourages drifting and de-motivates high achievers.

Leaders who won't challenge people harm them. Yes, challenging can go too far. But support is most meaningful when people are stretching themselves.

### *Harmful compassion:*

1. Parents who coddle children.
2. Team members who tolerate weaknesses under the guise of supporting the boss.
3. Leaders who prefer keeping the "peace" to developing the team.
4. Spouses who smile and say everything's OK when it isn't.

Compassion is weakness when support takes the form of avoidance.

### *Challenging compassionate supporters:*

Tell compassionate supporters that they're hurting their leaders/team members when they avoid issues. Use language like 'hurt' and 'harm'.

Use the language of compassion to confront avoiders.

Try saying, "You wouldn't intentionally harm anyone. But, what's happening when you won't point out negative patterns, poor performance, or disappointing results?"

Explain how they might make life better by encouraging improvement. You might say, "If you help the boss improve, you make life better for everyone on the team."

Challenge compassionate supporters when they justify weaknesses and minimize poor performance. "How are you helping when you allow poor performance to continue?"

### *Powerful voices:*

I've seen compassionate team members refuse to point out a leader's weaknesses. In reality, they're the best ones to do it.

Start the conversation for them.

Compassionate supporters may be reluctant to point out problems. If you start development conversations for them, they may find ways to keep it going.

Help compassionate supporters give

tangible expression to their heart. "I know you support the boss. One thing you can do to help your team is encourage the boss to be better."

Compassionate

supporters – who won't speak to weaknesses – are like parents who blame Johnny's teacher for his poor grades. It doesn't help when you shift blame, avoid issues, and encourage irresponsibility.

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/08/11/7-questions-that-answer-the-ultimate-opportunity-of-leadership/>





## 7 Habits of Tough-Minded Leaders

Mental toughness takes practice. But focus on developing these habits and you'll be on your way.

Every big thinker who's made a difference in our lives, from Thomas Edison to Bill Gates, has had a high degree of mental toughness—or what you might call a thick skull. It isn't just about being stubborn, although that's part of it. These tough-minded sorts make for great leaders and entrepreneurs because they keep moving toward their goals despite ridicule from naysayers who can't appreciate what they're trying to achieve. But mental toughness isn't necessarily something we're born with, as many believe. It's a set of characteristics we can all learn. Here are some habits the most tough-minded leaders have developed.

### 1. They Manage their Emotions

Mentally tough people have learned when and with whom it's safe to share their feelings. While they can still be vulnerable, they only tend to open up with people they trust and whose support they can count on. They can control their emotions and impulses in situations where it might be seen as a sign of weakness and turned against them. That isn't easy to do, but it starts with a finely tuned sensitivity to others that lets you determine whom you can depend on and whom you can't.

### 2. They're Self-Confident

Attempting anything outside the scope of what most people do requires a higher than normal degree of self-confidence. The most tough-minded leaders aren't born unusually confident, though. They continuously push

their own boundaries and move beyond their fears. This expands their ability to take risks and deal with the setbacks and failures that always come before a major breakthrough. When they finally reach it, their stamina, resilience, and mental fortitude grow so they can take on the next challenge ahead.

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### 3. They Choose Whom to Associate with Wisely

Mentally tough people hang out with other positive thinkers and trailblazers who share similar aspirations. They support one another and celebrate each other's

achievements. Whenever they're surrounded by negativity, they manage to tune it out. This takes practice, but it's the only way to prevent negative people from draining your valuable time and energy.

### 4. They Face Their Fears and Take Action

When confronted with the need to take a calculated risk, these leaders overcome their fears and go for it. They know any worthwhile achievement involves the risk of failure. For them, failure isn't the worst of all possibilities. Instead, it's the idea that they might miss out on some potentially great achievement because they listened to their fears. These are people for whom the worst-case scenario is regretting the important things they didn't attempt.

### 5. They say No when they have to

Many people say yes even when they don't want to do something just in order to please



[PHOTO: FLICKR USER [ALPHA DU CENTAURE](#)]

others—then regret it and complain about it afterward. Tough-minded people have learned not to do that. They can say no without feeling guilty, hedging their answers, or making excuses. This shows others around them they aren't pushovers and shouldn't be approached with unreasonable demands.

## **6. They're Self-Disciplined**

Tough-minded people...can say no without feeling guilty, hedging their answers, or making excuses.

Mentally tough people also have a great deal of self-discipline and tend to be committed to their own health and wellness. They seldom take the easy way out and keep up with their well-rounded exercise, eating, and sleeping routines. It isn't about vanity or self-absorption, though. To maintain your mental toughness, you have to appreciate how health, fitness, and adequate rest impact your overall wellness. Those physical factors are prerequisites for any big, taxing endeavor you're setting your sights on.

## **7. They're Independent and don't compare themselves to others**

Leaders who've developed mental toughness don't pay much attention to what others think of them. It's their well-defined goals that motivate and drive them, not how well they measure up to peers. While they respect others' opinions, they take full responsibility for their decisions and outcomes and don't pass the blame when things go wrong. Mentally tough people measure their self-worth based on whether they're a better person now than they once were. In other words, they're their own competition.

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<https://www.fastcompany.com/3049913/7-habits-of-tough-minded-leaders>

## **Are you Executive Material?**

By Lily Whiteman [careermatters.federaltimes.com](http://careermatters.federaltimes.com)

SHOULD YOU AIM for a Senior Executive Service job? Evaluate whether you would fit into the SES by interviewing as many SESers as possible. Also, consider how well your interests and goals would align with the rewards and demands of the SES. Here is some information to help you do so.

### **What SESers do**

SESers are leaders, devoting much of their effort to setting organizational goals and marching their organizations toward those goals. This requires making high-impact decisions about the structure and strategic plans of their organizations; allocating large budgets and other resources; collaborating with internal and external executives; and motivating and evaluating their staffs.

### **Rewards of SES jobs**

SESers are positioned to translate their visionary ideas into reality and improve important government programs on a large scale. As one SESer said, "Everyone in government can make a difference. But in the SES, you have a chance to make a big difference."

SESers are perched in lofty positions at the top levels of government; it's an honor to belong to the highly selective, elite corps of SESers who possess power and influence.

SESers take top-notch training and exchange ideas with other high-achieving leaders.

A new SESer usually receives a significant salary boost.

### **Demands/challenges of SES jobs**

If you thrive under pressure, enjoy the limelight—including public speaking—and are not afraid to be accountable for organizational results, you will probably be in your element in the SES.

SESers regularly interact with staffers throughout the hierarchy and sometimes must make unpopular decisions. So only aim for the SES if you are skilled at solving problems and resolving thorny conflicts, and if you are people-centric. Warning: Brace yourself for the possibility of death by meeting.

SES jobs consume great quantities of time, devotion and toil. Aim for the SES only if you're certain that you have the fire in the belly to work more, not less.

If you land an SES job, you may rightly feel, "I have arrived." But you will have arrived at an organization that—like all organizations—has flaws, and you will be leading people who—like all people—have foibles and resentments. Translating your vision into reality may be surprisingly difficult.

## Bridging the Gap Between Political Appointees and Civil Servants



Behind the headlines generated by the Senate health bill, the Russia investigation and looming debates over taxes and infrastructure plans, the work of government goes on. Social Security checks go out. National Park Service rangers continue to give tours at our parks and historic sites. And Transportation Security Administration inspectors still ensure that liquids go into your checked luggage. All this goes on largely without political direction from the Trump Administration, since so many of its nominees have yet to be named or confirmed by the Senate. According to the [Political Appointee Tracker](#) developed by the Partnership for Public Service and the *Washington Post*, Trump has yet to even nominate anyone to fill 354 of 577 key positions, and only 117 nominees have been confirmed to date. Another 106 await Senate action. This performance lags well behind that of Trump's four immediate predecessors.

These new political appointees will feel pressure to take charge quickly to make up for lost time. They will need to win over their respective agencies and make progress against the President's agenda. In more than two decades of service in the executive branch under four different administrations, I always admired political appointees with superb leadership and management skills and on the other side, the career civil servants with the political savvy to succeed under either political party. The chasm between the two worlds often leads to agency dysfunction, low morale and poor outcomes. As President Trump's appointees settle into their new positions, what can be done to bridge the gap? Both sides need to do a better job of understanding the other's mindset, strengths and weaknesses.

Here are some familiar caricatures that I learned to recognize on sight.

**The Commissar.** This political appointee is in charge of enforcing fidelity to the cause, ideology

and advancement of the party and personalities in power. Many conversations end in a variant of "It's my way or the highway."

**The Hack.** Easy to spot, this one's sole interest is their own advancement and will generally approach relationships like Kleenex: dispose after use. The good news is that s/he will usually move on before too much damage is done.

**The Closer.** This political is your ace in the hole. The closer possesses the juice, access and personality to work the bureaucracy or win a tough inter-agency dispute. He or she usually wins over the career staff when s/he puts the agency's mission over personal advancement and everyone wins.

**The Wonk.** These are political appointees who actively sought the position in an honest effort to advance the work of the department or agency. The wonk seeks alignment between prevailing policy preferences and the agency's core mission, usually making allies and actively nurturing relationships with career staff with the expertise and insider know-how to advance the mission.

**The Visionary.** When the stars align, the visionary meets a bureaucracy that's ready for change. The result can be dramatic turnaround of a once troubled department. The successful visionary will seek alignment of mission and talent, inspire passion in the workforce and build trust that wins over the bureaucracy.

So how do political appointees view career civil servants? A number of ways:

**The Troll.** This is the scourge of the new appointee – the career staffer with the reflexive, "we're already doing that" or "we tried and Congress hated it." Or, "there's no money, no staff, no etc." Nothing does more to confirm the political appointee's mistrust than when trolls rule the ranks.

**The Turtle.** The turtle isn't necessarily a bad sort. Bombarded by new and conflicting initiatives, unclear guidance and inexperienced or toxic leadership, the turtle withdraws into his shell and waits for better times. Turtles adopt the "Weeby" attitude, because they know that at the end of the administration, "weeby here, you be gone."

**The Maven.** The true government subject matter expert, the maven has spent decades in the field and is a treasure trove of expertise and institutional knowledge that the political overlooks at his own peril. There are two types of maven. There's the lone wolf who would just as soon be left alone to

pursue his work. And then there's the expert with a passion for public service who brings credibility and quality work to the appointees' agenda. This is the one the shrewd political will court. Mavens also have their own networks of experts and mentees that can be pulled in by the political who has the smarts to seize the opportunity.

**The Translator.** This is the career employee who has an ear for the language, message and attitudes of the sitting administration (though not necessarily agreeing with it). Generally, this person is a political junkie who followed the campaign and knows the pedigrees of the players on both sides of the political divide. When "[covfefe](#)" is required, the translator can provide both the context for the latest initiative as well as the winning turn of phrase that conveys the career staff's views in a language that can win over balky political appointees.

**The Fixer.** The fixer is the seasoned federal manager or senior expert (in law, procurement or human resources, etc.) whose experience is critical when the problems are complex and require technical knowledge and bureaucratic savvy to solve. These are the career players that devise the legislative fix or the new programmatic approach or the new hiring mechanism that can make or break a high-profile initiative. You want one of these in the room.

With all of these characters, how can committed public servants—regardless of their political persuasion or their status as career staff or appointees—come together for better policy outcomes? A leap of faith may be necessary. Specifically:

**Leap No. 1 (for appointees): Seek out the mavens.** Politicals are well-advised to mine the halls of the bureaucracy for the true federal experts whose deep knowledge and experience often go overlooked or ignored in the rush to do something different. Take the time to learn about past successes and failures and what are easy missteps to avoid in planning a new initiative.

**Leap No. 1 (for career staff): Put your best fixer forward.** This federal manager will have experience translating the political needs of appointees into tangible outcomes from the bureaucracy. With enough expertise and savvy, the fixer will counsel the political team to do "more rowing and less steering," i.e. get them to articulate the desired outcomes while the fixers work with the career staff to make it happen.

**Leap No. 2 (for appointees): Don't Ignore the**

**trolls.** Engage them. Trolls weren't necessary always trolls. Some got that way by listening to leadership platitudes about "doing more with less" and "working smarter not harder" without anyone willing to recognize the real-world constraints they face. Listen with empathy and have a true dialog. This will reveal the legislative, regulatory, budget and policy constraints that could get in the way of delivering results and will probably yield a suggestion or two about how to address them.

**Leap No. 2 (for career staff): Make the political calendar work for you.** The disconnect between the long-term and embedded nature of the problems we face and the insanely short-term nature of the political calendar is an enduring challenge to good public policy. Instead of lamenting this fact, the career staff needs to understand the best time to float new ideas, the value of engaging new actors, the time to salute smartly. It's vital to understand the importance of quick wins in any long-term effort. This sensitivity to the political needs of the administration will make the relationship easier.

**Leap No. 3: Play fair.** Fairness, integrity, competence and predictability are the bedrock behaviors for promoting organizational trust. Trust failures occur when there is a disconnect or dysfunction between an organization's mission or core values and leadership behavior. Leaders of both teams need to evaluate their behaviors to see that they act in ways that promote rather than undermine trust across the gap.

**Leap No. 4: Have the conversation.** Leaders on both sides need to figure out how to discuss issues in a safe space where political leadership can clearly articulate their needs and expectations as well as indicate what they don't know and where they need help. Career folks need to listen anew and think how they might reframe old and new problems to release the talents and mitigate the constraints of the bureaucracy.

These leaps of faith don't guarantee and end to the friction between the players. But as new leadership takes shape, bridging the gap will lay the foundation for long-term success.

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<http://www.govexec.com/excellence/promising-practices/2017/08/bridging-gap-between-political-appointees-and-civil-servants/140146/?oref=voices-module>



## ***HOW TO CONFRONT SITUATIONS YOU SHOULD HAVE DEALT WITH SOONER***

If you think it's difficult to have a tough conversation today, waiting makes it worse.

Time makes elephants fat, complacent, and harder to confront.

### ***Patience:***

It's not patient to tolerate poor performance. It's neglect. Poor performance, bad behaviors, and difficult situations continue until leaders speak up.

Be patient *after* you bring up issues.

### ***The conversation you should have had:***

Kind candor and courageous vulnerability chart the path forward, when you should have said something sooner.



1. Don't lay the law down. Delay elevates frustration. Anger fuels courage. You end up sharing a piece of your mind you can't afford to lose.
2. Don't speak to the whole team when there's one offender. One person habitually leaves early, arrives late to meetings, or misses deadlines. Have a one-on-one, even though group comments feel safer.
3. Meet resistance with courageous vulnerability. Tom habitually misses deadlines, for example. When you bring it up, he protests. "Why didn't you say something sooner?"

Tom is right.

Don't defend or explain. Apologize.

"You're right Tom. I apologize for not bringing this up sooner. Tolerating this wasn't fair to you or the team. I'm dealing with it now. Can we fix this?" Wait for Tom to say, "Yes."

Resistance turns to participation with "Yes".

### **4 Tips:**

1. Build positive relationships. Have lots of positive conversations.
2. Bring up issues when issues are small. "I notice you missed your last deadline."
  - W hat are you learning?
  - What will you do next time?
  - How can I help?
3. Take excuses seriously. When Tom says, "I'm terrible with time management," ask, "What would you like to do about that?"
4. Develop a plan to solve issues. Don't simply declare that you expect things to change.

Patience with poor performance eventually becomes permission to perform poorly. Approval becomes abuse.

<https://leadershipfreak.blog/2017/07/25/how-to-confront-situations-you-should-have-dealt-with-sooner/>